ONCE BOUGHT, ALWAYS BOUGHT.

SHORT STORIES

EDITED BY C. ARTHUR PEARSON (OF PEARSON'S WEEKLY)

No. 289.—Vol. XI. FOR WEEK ENDING JULY 14, 1894. [Price One Penny.

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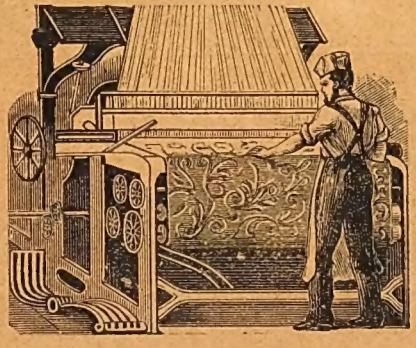

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SHORT STORIES.

EDITED BY C. ARTHUR PEARSON.

No. 289.—Vol. XI. *FOR THE WEEK ENDING JULY 14, 1894.* [PRICE ONE PENNY.

CHAPTER I.

I HAPPENED to be detained for a time in a small and exceedingly tumble-down old town in Germany.

The place of which I speak is little better than a large village, though in deference to the feelings of its worthy inhabitants, who consider it, no doubt, as the "hub of the universe," I have dignified it with the appellation of town, and it lies quite out of the ordinary run of tourists, high and dry above the restless ebb and flow of the great excursional ocean.

Dummelsheim lies in one of the loveliest of the many lovely green valleys which run like tongues of verdure between the pine-clad heights and crags of the Black Forest.

It is set down on a small patch of tableland, above which rise some wonderful shapes of crag and pine forest, and below which a little mountain stream rushes frantically night and day, raging and tearing its little life out among the great boulders and between the fern-clad banks, yearning to obliterate itself in the nearest river that offers a refuge.

I happened to be detained in this place by special business for a whole fortnight.

A fortnight in Dummelsheim, with nothing to do, represents about five years of ordinary existence in length and tedium.

I explored the lovely valley, not without feeling the charm of its peace and isolation; I drank, as in duty bound, very many tumblers of the peculiarly nauseous spa water, of which the Dummelsheimers are so unreasonably proud; and then time began to hang heavily on my hands.

There was no gaming table, no theatre, no concert-hall.

At last I discovered a diversion. It came in the shape of a compatriot, a resident compatriot. Not that in appearance or garb he was much of an Englishman. Twenty years' residence in Dummelsheim had made him as much a German as the Germans, and had quite obliterated the handiwork of the good old land that gave him birth.

He had all but forgotten his mother speech, and when he endeavoured to use it his sentences were patched together by the Teutonic words and phrases which came most readily to his tongue. He was as regardless of his personal appearance as the most inborn of the Dummelsheimers, and as devoted to the consumption of tobacco as the best of them.

It was supposed that he was a bachelor. At any rate, of "womankind" he had none, and lived alone with merely the intermittent aid of a supernaturally hideous frau at those times when scouring and cleansing became a bitter necessity.

It was in a *café* that I first met with him. I thought when I first saw him, "What a dreadful shaggy old German that is; no one could mistake his nationality, at any rate."

He seemed to be a part and parcel of the green, mouldy place, a sort of human lichen, an animated fungus on two short and sturdy legs.

However, a compatriot is a compatriot, and if one has to scrape the dirt from his countenance in order to recognise him, the operation must be gone through for the sake of the dear land of our fathers.

My German Englishman proved, as a companion, decidedly more entertaining than one would have expected from his looks, and in his morning rambles with me pointed out, with great care, what he knew of the antiquities of the little town; showed me a wood where one of the Dummelsheimers had once, in a fit of playfulness, applied a hatchet to the back hair of his betrothed, and also the gaol in front of which he was afterward hanged as a punishment for his little escapade.

Many other spots of interest, where incidents of a less tragic though still striking character had occurred, were also designated by his kindly walking-stick as we strolled along.

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After a day or so my newly-found friend began to resume his native speech, so long disused, and by that time I also had learned to translate into ordinary English his quaint and puzzling Anglo-German expressions.

So we managed to get on very well together, and I found him an interesting, if a slightly dirty old man. The town, when explained by such a cicerone, was invested with quite a new charm of interest.

It was quaint enough without any extraneous help, and the houses, being for the most part ancient timbered edifices, and the gables leaning forward with age and hanging over the streets, one obtained every now and again a street vista of delicious picturesqueness, in which the ancient houses, nodding toward each other, seemed to be whispering forgotten piquant scandal of the good old German days.

There were at every turn and corner abundant "bits," which an artist for an illustrated paper would have found very handy, and sketches which he could have rapidly converted into current coin of the realm.

I am no artist, but, to my great surprise, I discovered that my dear and dirty new-found acquaintance and countryman was. One day, having accompanied him to the queer and humble lodging which he inhabited, I found on the walls certain indubitable proofs of his artistic bent.

There were many admirable sketches in chalk and sepia of striking points in the valley, and of certain buildings and objects in the town itself.

The fountain in the market place was there, with its great St. Christopher as its centre figure. There were the porch of St. Christopher's Church, the quaint turret at the angle of the town hall, and the crumbling ruins of an ancient fortress on the Ganzberg. Among other things I noticed a sketch of a certain picturesque old house which I had indeed seen, but the locality of which I did not remember at the time.

I mentioned this fact.

"Ah, I have never shown you that! It is in the Lederstrasse," he replied. "We will see the place to-morrow."

On the morrow, accordingly, we walked together to the Lederstrasse.

As we entered the dirty old street my companion remarked, "I have never been in this street for twenty years or more, and I never wish to enter it again."

My curiosity was roused.

"Why?" I inquired.

"I got so great a fright here once, and I was so much laughed at," he answered.

"Why, what is there about this street to frighten you? It is old enough, certainly, and quaint enough, and smells rather—pah!" I exclaimed, as a full flavoured German stench saluted my nostrils; "but nothing terrible after all."

"Well, mein Herr, it is not the street; it is that house, and—the ghost in it," the Anglo-German replied, with a sort of shudder, so to speak, in his voice.

A supernaturally hideous frau.

"Oh, oh! then you have not lived long enough yet, and you are not quite a boy, to get rid of your superstitions, eh? You are still afraid of ghosts, are you?"

"I was afraid of what I saw," he replied, with a certain amount of dignity, as if hurt by my light manner and my tones of mockery.

My curiosity was of course aroused by this speech, and I was about to question him further when, pointing with his stick, he said briefly:

"That's the house there."

A sketch of a certain picturesque old house.

I looked and recognised in the ancient timbered edifice on the farther side of the street the original of the chalk sketch of his lodgings.

It was a tumbledown pile, with overhanging storeys and carved "barge board," having, however, a curiously twisted chimney of ancient, ruddy brickwork, and certain obscure remains of armorial bearings over the door. There was a date which, however, I could only make out in its state of dilapidation to be fifteen—and something or other.

The edifice seemed to have been long deserted, and the grass was growing in tufts among the stones at the front door as if the passers-by had long been accustomed to avoid a too near acquaintance with the old tenement.

Indeed, something about the building said as plainly as the German version of Tom Hood's poem could have said:

"The house is haunted."

Nay, the very street itself seemed to be haunted. It was in a great part deserted. The tumbledown buildings on either side of the picturesque house seemed to be devoid of occupants, and the few sordid and wretched houses in the street which appeared to enjoy the presence of tenants had, to my imagination, and in the gathering dusk of evening, a scared and terrified aspect.

"Look well at that window," said my conductor, pointing to a large, battered casement just above the door, "and when we go I will tell you what I know about it. That will do," he continued, taking hold of my arm; "you have seen it, and it is not good to stay in the street; it chills the blood, I imagine."

"Indeed it does," I replied, and we moved off, not, I fancy, without a thrill of pleasure at leaving behind us the ghostly atmosphere of the Lederstrasse. A few crows, flitting inhabitants of the desolate street, were wheeling about the roofs and chimneys of the house as we departed.

CHAPTER II.

I went with my acquaintance back to his lodging, and there, over a plentiful supply of lager beer and the smoke of two big pipes, he told me his experience of the house and street we had quitted.

"Twenty years ago—I was rather younger then, I fancy; I mean not in years merely, but in life and hopes—I had recently come to this town, and before I was long in it I heard a great deal of talk about a queer ghost, quite unlike any ghost I had ever heard or read of, which was said to haunt the Lederstrasse, and which the people of the town so much dreaded.

"Hans Hubbler, down the Granzstrasse, had seen it when

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a boy, and old Frau Hertzler had all but died from fright when she was sixteen years old in consequence of a mere glimpse of it. It was the celebrity of the little town.

"Well, I laughed at all the stories, and grew very courageous over the matter in my *café* when the night grew late and the bottle was low. Some of the fellows there tried to chaff me on the score of my nationality. 'Ein Englander,' they said, 'always asserts that he will brave anything—dog or fiend or fraulein—but let him be set to the test and he is not always so brave as a lion.' Then one of them said:

"'This Herr Englander here, he has heard enough and is brave, but let him face a test we will give him if he be a brave Englander, and we shall see.'

"So one night in the Restaurant Kloppart, in the milk market—I remember well that night. Ach, mein Herr, is that door fast? So! I remember that night. I was fired with courage, and I said, when they spoke of the ghost, that I would face it, come what might.

"A grin of incredulity passed over the countenance of my listeners, and they puffed away at their pipes in contemptuous silence. At last big-boned Krantz Hubscher, the butcher, made me a bet that I would not sleep for one night in the old house in the Lederstrasse alone.

"'Done!' I cried, and the money was staked, not much, a few louis, and I was pledged to an adventure.

"It struck me afterwards that a great number of the ghost stories I had myself read turned upon some unused house or room and an undertaking to sleep there; but further than this you will see, my case had little resemblance to any other spectral adventure. Nor did this render my case less real or less terrifying.

"'What sort of a ghost is it?' I asked. 'Tell me just that, so that I may know what kind of an appearance I am about to face.'

"'Ach hein!' they said, 'mein Herr must just see him as he is, and enjoy him as he will.'

"So the night was fixed upon and the key of the ancient house procured. A mattress and some candles, and also a pistol (at my request), were taken into the biggest and best room—that one just over the doorway. A good bottle of Zeltinger and a supper for me were got ready, and a roaring fire of big logs was built up in the afternoon in the fireplace there.

"The people living in the Lederstrasse were much astonished and a good deal interested at the unwonted glare in the windows of the haunted house; and, when they were informed of the reason of the illumination, expressed a good deal of pity for the mad Englishman whose craze had tempted him to brave the ghost of the locality.

"Night came—a dark night it was, in November, with windy gusts every now and again sweeping down the street and among the crazy old chimneys. There was a pale, gibbous moon that showed itself at intervals from between the drifting clouds in a very weird and uncanny fashion.

"'Just the night for a ghost story,' I said to myself, and thought, as I felt a little thrill come over me, 'Shall I pay the small debt and have done with the matter? Shall I cry off and smoke my pipe at home and turn into my bed at my usual hour in peace?'

"'No!' I decided, after some consideration, 'I will go through with my undertaking now, come what may, and show these Germans what an Englishman can do, and will do, at need.'

"So I made all my preparations for my adventure, and about ten o'clock entered the house with two or three friends, who had resolved to accompany me in order that they might see me comfortably disposed of.

"Stay a bit," I said to myself.

"The crazy old stairs creaked a good deal as we went up them, but the room looked exceedingly cosy, for the great logs were smouldering in the chimney, and cast out an agreeable heat. In all the corners, and hanging from the beams, were many dingy cobwebs, the work of generations of spiders, undeterred from their toil by the house's evil reputation.

"Save these cobwebs, my mattress, a couple of chairs, and a small round table, upon which stood my supper and the good bottle of Zeltinger, the room was unfurnished.

"As a further aid to courage I had provided myself with a flask of eau de vie, and, of course, had my pipe.

"My friends, having cast an approving glance round the room, sat down smoking for a few minutes, and then bade me 'guten abend' and 'gute nacht,' and left me to my meditations.

"I listened to their heavy boots as they went stump, stump, stump down the stairs, and to the street door as it shut to with a bang.

"I was alone in the house of evil repute.

"'Stay a bit,' I said to myself; 'this is perhaps a joke, a trick, and it will be with the living Germans that I may have to deal. Well, the pistol will give an account of them; but I will make myself as safe as I can.'

"So I took from my pocket a screwdriver and a paper of big screws, and with a quiet smile at my own cunning—for of these screws I had said nothing to any one—proceeded forthwith to screw up the door.

"The door made fast, I walked round the room and carefully took stock of it. There was a small corner cupboard. I opened this; nothing there but spiders, their webs, and the carcases of their victims.

"On the other side of the fireplace was a very low door, about the height of my shoulder. Another cupboard, I thought, and endeavoured, for a long time without success, to prise it open. When at last it yielded, I discovered, with some surprise, a step, and another low door, evidently strongly nailed up, and which, from its appearance, had been for ages in the same condition.

"This discovery gave me for the moment a turn. 'What a strange thing,' I said to myself, 'a passage leading to somewhere; just like these haunted chambers usually have. However, I will take good care that no one makes use of this passage to-night, at any rate.'

"And so closing the low door I proceeded to make it fast with some more of my great screws. As I did so and was driving the screws home I felt a queer sensation from my right hand to my elbow, something like a faint electric shock; 'pressed on the nerve somehow,' I said, and continued my work.

"This done, I had my supper, lit my pipe, and drank the half of my wine. The chimes of St. Christopher's tower startled me sounding the hour of eleven. I was, however, in a peaceful frame of mind, without the least fear of anything human or superhuman, and I gazed placidly at the red smouldering logs and puffed my pipe in peace.

"Suddenly, however, the fact that the hour of midnight would soon approach gave me a little shiver. I quickly quenched the feeling with a drop of my eau de vie.

"Nevertheless, I thought, there is no use in sitting thus. I may as well go to bed, then I shall, without doubt, fall asleep, know nothing till to-morrow morning, and be able to go home with flying colours.

"Accordingly I prepared for rest, and as I can never sleep well with my clothes on, pulled off all my attire with the exception of my shirt, took a final drink of the eau de vie, laid

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ready my pistol, and lay down upon my mattress, drawing a single blanket over me.

"I lay with my feet turned toward the glowing embers, which diffused grateful heat and gave sufficient light to enable me to discern the objects—such as they were—in the chamber after I had extinguished my candle. The feeling of security, born of the fact that I had securely screwed up the only two doors which opened into the room, did its work, and in a very little time I fell asleep.

"I cannot tell how long I slept. All I know is that I seemed to wake up from a feeling of cold, as if someone were blowing upon me with a pair of bellows. I rubbed my eyes, remembered where I was, and experienced a slight feeling of unhappiness to find that the night had not passed over and that I was still in the haunted chamber.

"The fire was all but dead, the moon, as I could see through the uncurtained window, seemed to be plunging her way among great banks and masses of cloud, the room was fitfully lighted here and there with a strange twilight of moon and fire.

"Somehow my eyes fixed themselves on the low door by the side of the hearth. Could it be possible? Was that door opening? No; impossible! I had screwed it up far too tight for that.

"Yes; something strange was taking place. Whether the door was opening or something was coming through it I could not tell; but I felt that a change was taking place, and sat up in my bed in silent terror, with that peculiar sensation in my body which persons of an imaginative disposition are pleased to call 'goose-flesh.'

"Fixing my gaze firmly upon that mysterious door, I sat and watched it. Little by little the aspect of the door changed. It became white, bleached as it were, and then, to my intense horror, a something seemed to pass through it and to stand in front of it.

"Yes; that something gradually assumed shape and proportion. I could see the head, the body, the arms—the form was that of a man. Then, while my hair stood up right upon my head with terror, I noticed its stern, wan face, its costume of a long bygone age, its lean and withered arms and its attenuated legs. Could it be a man in the flesh? No, clearly no, for I could see through it and discern that the little door at the back of it was fast screwed up as I had left it. This was no man in whom was the breath of life, a phantom, a form, a show, merely an image, and how inexpressibly ghastly and terrific.

"When I had fully realised this fact I became a prey to the most abject terror. It was true, then, about the ghost! It was no trick, no joke, that I was to be subjected to, but before me was a supernatural shape for the first time in my life.

"I became seized with a species of fascination as well as by terror; I gazed fixedly at the appearance, covered as it was by a strange, unearthly light.

"It was the figure of a tall, lean man, for it had by degrees risen far above the height of the low door from which it had emerged.

"Its eyes were fixed upon me, and over one of its arms it carried a number of dark objects, the shape of which I could not make out.

"But, horror of horrors! it was quietly nearing my bed.

"I arose at once and stood erect, trembling in every limb. In vain I tried to speak; my lips refused to utter a word. I could only stare fixedly and in silence at the strange, glittering figure. The form, doubtless it was, of some creature who had walked in the streets of Dummelsheim in the flesh and lived in this house some 150 years ago, still haunting, in its ancient shape, the well-known spots.

"The spectre advanced and I retreated before it, holding out my arms as if to ward it off.

"I never thought of using my pistol save at one moment, but the fact that the figure was transparent at once convinced me that to fire at it would be of no avail.

"Still the terrible shape approached with a silent, noiseless stride; then, on reaching the middle of the room, it seemed to motion me with one of its arms towards the chair.

"I hesitated. Its actions became imperative, and I was constrained to obey. Once seated, the spectre, which appeared to have acquired a perfect control over my paralysed senses, took something from over its left arm, and signed to me to stretch out my leg. I did so mechanically—and then—how can I convey to you the feeling that came over me as it proceeded to pull what seemed to be a stocking of ice upon my left leg?

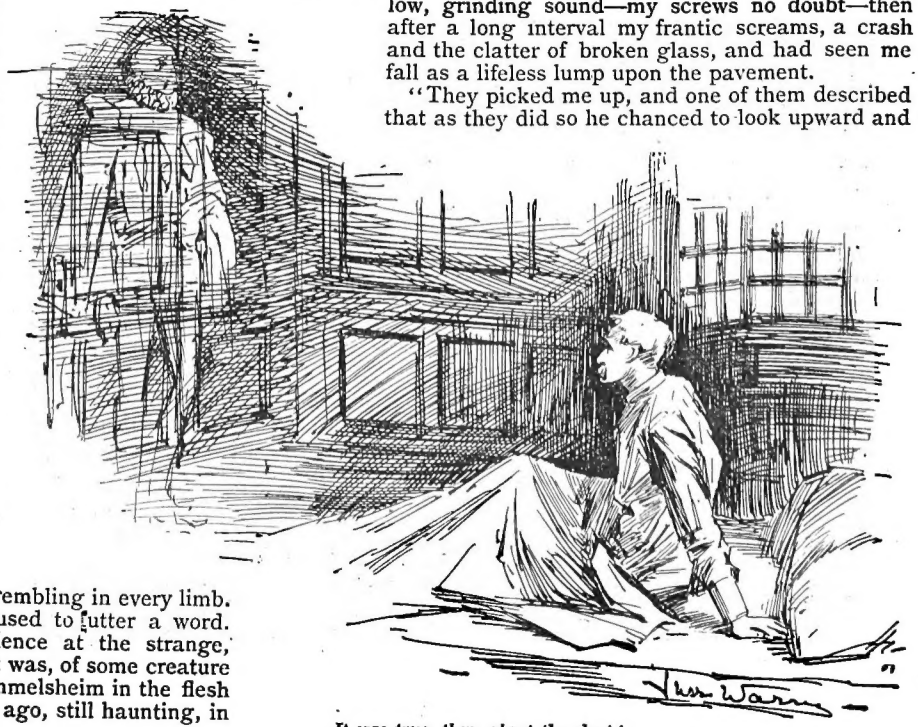
"I can even now at times feel the horrible icy coldness of that spectral hose. It was a stocking that the figure was pulling upon my bare leg and foot. It was chilled to the very bone, my hair bristled, my head swam, my heart ceased to beat for a moment; higher and higher crept the ice cold stocking upon my leg. The stocking was on. This accomplished, the spectre motioned me to stretch out the other leg.

"My horror now fairly broke the spell that chained me. I fled to the door, the spectre glided after me smoothly and silently as a fate. I seized the handle of the door—miserable! I remembered that I had fastened myself in with the ghost. My reason seemed to be escaping me. The steel-like glitter of the spectre's eyes was fixed upon me. Like a hunted and doomed animal I fled round the apartment. I leaped at the window, crashed through it, and fell into the street below.

"I must have lost consciousness at once, for the next thing I remember was lying on my bed in my own lodgings, with my good landlady and the acquaintances who had dared me to the terrible trial standing round my bed.

"It was said for some time after that the poor Englander was going mad, as all the others who had seen the ghost of Lederstrasse had done. I cheated them however. My head was too strong, I suppose, for I got over my fright, and after my broken leg had been set, could listen to their recital of what had taken place. I learned that those who had set themselves to watch in the street had heard first a strange, low, grinding sound—my screws no doubt—then after a long interval my frantic screams, a crash and the clatter of broken glass, and had seen me fall as a lifeless lump upon the pavement.

"They picked me up, and one of them described that as they did so he chanced to look upward and



It was true, then, about the ghost!

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saw at the broken window above, in the moonlight, a pale, shadowy face and the glitter of two bright eyes.

"It is not strange to say my right leg was broken by the fall; but it is, I think, somewhat strange to relate that my left was blackened to the knees as if scorched, nay, it is so to this day—see!"

My friend showed me his blackened leg.

"And that is all?" I asked.

"All, lieber, Himmel! Is not that enough? Can you wonder after what I have told you that I don't like the Lederstrasse?"

"Wonder, not I! I would not go near the place again after dark for a grand duke's ransom. But who do they say the spectre was?"

"I don't quite know. There is a legend of some hosier who once lived in that house and was rich, who fell into some disgrace, and the reigning duke of Saxe-Dummelsheim seized upon him, and with a refinement in cruelty, in order to extort from him his money, caused him to be put to a torture something in the manner of our ancient machine called 'the boot,' which crushed the leg of the victim.

"In this case the instrument was a hose of steel, which was at the onset icy cold and was then heated by fire to almost a red heat. The poor hosier sank under the dreadful torture.

"It is said that his ghost now seeks to avenge itself upon all who approach his ancient abode, and that he tries on them his ghastly hose; if he succeeds in getting both hose on their legs they die and his spirit is released from its wanderings."

Such was the case of the queer old Anglo-German. I went to my inn and to bed; there I lay and pondered long upon the strange story I had heard. My sleep, when sleep came, was not of the best. Every now and again I awoke with a start and a shudder, and fancied that a ghostly hosier was pulling upon my own legs the spectral hose of the story.

A day or two passed by, and one night, as I was packing my portmanteau for my homeward journey on the morrow, I was startled by a great yellow light in the sky. Soon after I heard the hoarse and blatant voice of the alarm bell. I dressed and went out, and found the whole population of the place running in one direction.

I followed the stream of folk. It was a fire, someone told me, in the Lederstrasse; the haunted house was burning down. We arrived in the ancient narrow street; the sight was magnificent; the whole building was enveloped in flames. No one took the slightest trouble or endeavoured to get the flames under control. All were staring and gaping in idle curiosity.

"It was a bad place," someone said, "and we are well content to see it perish."

How or by whom the fire was kindled I never knew.

THE ADVENTURES OF A MATRIMONIAL AD.

THE *Roseton News* was not a great paper. It did not subscribe to the Association, nor did it have a special correspondent in Fleet Street. Ofttimes the shears vied with the editorial pencil in filling out its columns.

It had but one reporter, yet a more energetic, irrepressible, self-satisfied penman than Fred Stokes seldom existed. In a dearth of news, or amid the pleasant lethargy of good times, he could fall back upon the reportorial imagination, evolving from airy nothings a succession of rumours and prognostications with an unfailing shrewdness that verged upon, yet never overstepped, the dim line of probability.

When not chasing the festive item, or cornering an elusive sensation, he would assist his editorial chief in the latter's more onerous task. He would concoct poetic and taking advertisements; extract the pith of some great London editor's opinions on the "burning issues" of the day; and all this in addition to other multifarious duties.

Often would the editor remove his cigar, elevate his legs, and, as the blue smoke curled upward, reward his satellite with a jovial nod of approval and say—

"Fred, me boy, next to mesilf, the *News* would be lost without ye."

The editor's ancestral fluid was of an Irish tincture, and a slight suspicion of brogue often intruded itself upon his tongue when the editor grew interested.

"I'm indebted to ye, and if ever ye get into a toight place, call upon your chief. Gratitude, me son—a—ahem! Here's that account of young Shurtleff's marriage. Terrible swell affair that; we must shove it in the third column—editorial page—and be hanged to it!"

"Look here, sir," said Fred, after one of these pleasant interjectional colloquies with his chief, "here's a matrimonial ad. in the *Daily Post* for a wife: 'Wealthy Cuban'—rich—presumably unsophisticated—'wants to Anglicise himself, and as a preliminary step he wants an English wife. She must be young, handsome, refined, and so on. Money not essential. Address, Zanaga, Box Q.K., *Daily Post* office, in confidence.' I believe I'll answer it—huge joke, you see."

Here the editor looked dubious. "Perhaps we can work up something stunning out of this for the *News*. Who knows?"

The editor brightened enthusiastically.

"Roight you are," said he. "But it will take exceedingly adroit manipulation, me boy."

Fred considered the matter, and then indicted a modest reply in a flowing feminine hand, signing himself (the deceitful rascal) "Miss Nellie Jardine." The editor read it with admiration.

"A roight tender and circumspect rejoinder. It wouldn't surprise me, now, if ye weren't a born novelist, after all."

So Sammis was given a tip. Fred posted his letter, then carelessly waited further developments. In due time came a reply. Our Cuban expressed his surprise and pleasure at hearing so assuringly from Miss Nellie Jardine, and said that, out of a score of answers, hers was the one that pleased him most.

She alone, he continued with tropical ardour, was the one woman for him. He felt it, his heart told him so, and thus on, through several pages of blind infatuity. He concluded by hoping, praying, imploring that she would at once reply and exchange photographs with her adoring slave.

"Bedad, sir," said the editor, "you are in for it. I behold already the consummation. Ye'll be donning petticoats next, and the reportorial department of the *News* will feel an aching void, that is, when you're off to visit this Cuban in London, me boy."

Several letters on either side were sent and photographs exchanged, Fred sending that of an extremely pretty girl he had met at the seaside one summer. He was beginning, however, to tire of the tender monotony, when, one day, he laid upon the editor's desk a neat package, which, on being opened, disclosed a pair of earrings and a brooch set with garnet and pearls. The editor examined them critically. Fred seemed more dismayed than amused.

"They're worth a hundred guineas, me boy—if they're genuine. What does the fellow say about them?"

"Why, it's a present, he says, and hints of more to come, and that we must arrange for a meeting, all this with the wildest protestations of eternal love and fidelity. Hang it! This is getting serious. I never thought the fool would go so far."

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"Write him that the sudden death of one of your uncles, cousins, or aunts, calls you off to the Continent instantly, me boy. Hint of great riches falling your way, of a family mystery imposing silence. Tell him to possess his soul in patience, and that he will hear from you in a month or so. Then you can return his confounded jewellery and break up the affair—somehow—anyhow."

The editor felt himself sagacious, yet his conclusion was misty, too misty it seemed, when, two days later, Fred rushed into the sanctum with an open letter in his hand, his eyes dilated and his hair dishevelled. "Sir," he said, "I'm ruined, devastated. I must leave, obliterate myself, and the *News* will have to get another man. Read that."

He dashed the letter down upon the desk and fell to gnawing his nails nervously. The editor looked up wonderingly, then read the note. After a few passionate, devotional interjections, it wound up by stating that this fond lover would run down to Roseton on the following Friday to see his "adored one," his "queen."

"Isn't this something like a predicament?" exclaimed Fred, as his chief sat tapping the arm of the editorial chair with his blue pencil, and his eyes fixed reflectingly upon his assistant. "Can you make me an advance of £10 or so? I'll get Meigs to take my place and flee to some pathless wilderness for a while, until this infatuated foreigner recovers his reason."

"Fred, me boy," said the editor sagely, "I know a trick worth two of that. Write me a touching obituary notice of Miss Nellie Jardine's very sudden demise. A congestive chill, spinal meningitis; anything of that sort will do. We'll just insert that little notice and have one copy struck off.

"Have it marked and sent to that poor fool of a Cuban, together with the jewellery he has sent, and, presto, me boy! you are out of the whole affair in no time. We won't need Meigs then; he's a dunderhead, and you can still go on with your work."

Fred, though at first doubtful, fell in with this idea, and the programme was fully carried out.

The announcement, beginning, "Sudden death of an estimable young lady," was really quite pathetic, and so tickled Fred's fancy that his nervousness vanished as Wednesday and Thursday passed. He became so absorbed in other things that when on Friday, a wild-eyed, haggard, foreign-looking man burst into the sanctum with a paper in his hand, Fred looked up serenely, then recognised, with an appalling thrill, that it was the Cuban from the photograph the latter had sent.

The editor had just gone out to take some liquid refreshment with a big advertiser and a political candidate, and probably would not be back for half an hour. Fred realised that he had to face his own particular lion alone.

"Roosvicle News—ees it here?" asked the stranger in a sombre tone.

"Well—a—I'm not so sure." Fred hesitated whether to frankly own up or ignominiously flee.

"E—et must be. I was so told. Señor—have you see zat?"

He pointed to the notice in the paper he held, and watched Fred anxiously.

"Zat—zat——" his voice was profoundly melancholy. "Oh, señor! I am desolate—I am inconsolable. I no one know I here. Will you—so kindly—to take me to the grave? Her last resting place, señor?"

Fred here suddenly felt an inspiration that lent him a glimpse of rescue. Only two days before, in the little cemetery, a new grave had been made. A member of a family little known and recently arrived at Roseton, had died and been there.

Why not take the man there, and leave him alone with his sorrow? Then Fred could have a little time to devise some method of escaping from him. He arose with an amiable and sympathetic smile.

"Certainly, sir," he said, reaching for his hat. "Come with me. It was a most melancholy event, and as you seem interested, I see no harm in showing you the grave of our esteemed young townswoman."

The stranger grasped Fred's hand, wrung it feverishly and prepared to follow him. He called in the office boy and then the two men sallied forth down a back street. Fred did not wish to meet acquaintances just then. After a while they came out on a pleasant road that led to the cemetery. Arriving there, he pointed out the way to the grave.

"No trouble in finding it, sir, it's the only new one. You will want to be alone, and—should you wish to leave a place connected with such sad memories at once, there's a London train at four-fifteen. Good-day."

Fred was off like a rocket, half determined to pack his worldly goods and go to see his mother, whom he had not visited for two years. But, on his return to the office, the editor was awaiting him with a telegram in hand.

"Look here," said his chief. "I've got to leave you in five minutes. There's a plot on foot to unseat Jones, and he and I have got to run up to town and see about it. I'll be back in two days; not a word now, I trust you as I do mesilf. You can run things. Where's my overcoat?"

So the editor departed with a rush, giving Fred hardly time to open his mouth. He felt desperate. That mad and melancholy Cuban would be back, asking troublesome questions, and anyone might drop in. He shuddered at the thought of the direful possibilities ahead.

But the afternoon wore off, and the Cuban did not return. Fred breathed easier; perhaps the fellow had really taken the train. When he locked up the office and started upon his evening walk, his fears had flown.

He felt exultant, and also pitied good-humouredly the wild-eyed foreigner and his imaginary woes.

He turned down a grassy lane, near which stood a house seclusively sheltered by shrubberies and trees. From the front gate a man and woman came forth, and walked toward him arm in arm. His fears suddenly revived as he recognised his Cuban again.

The other was a lovely lady in deep mourning. Imagine his surprise when the man greeted him joyfully, ecstatically, all his former dejection gone, and his face wreathed in smiles.

"Ah, my friend," said the Cuban, "you have saved my life and restored my happiness. Señor, I cannot tell how much to you I owe. You send me to that grave, and there what do I find? I see there alive and well, my old, old love, from whom I long separate for years. I forget my new grief. I go there sad, I come away rejoicing, and to you, señor, I owe all of zat—yes—all—all."

Explanations ensued, during which the Cuban eagerly introduced his companion. It appeared that years before, in Cuba, he wooed and won the daughter of a prominent patriot leader of the island. After a time, a price was set upon that chieftain's head by the Spanish authorities and he and his family suddenly disappeared, while our Cuban was away in foreign parts on business. On the latter's return, he could find no trace of them, and after months of fruitless waiting, he gave up all hope of ever again seeing his affianced.

Years passed. He came to England and began to think of marriage again. Hence the advertisement and the cruel practical joke that had, after all, resulted so happily. The grave to which Fred had sent him was really that of a brother of the lady now by his side. He met her there, in tears over her own family bereavement.

They recognised each other. She had remained true to him, and she was his first love. Their grief was changed into joy, and he went home with her. The strange family spoken of was hers, and for political reasons they were living in England under an assumed name.

They had renewed their troth, and, in his happiness, the mystery of Miss Nellie Jardine was not again alluded to by him. Perhaps he had not wanted his first sweetheart to know. Fred himself was only too glad to drop the subject. He left them well on towards the seventh heaven, but learned in a few days that the whole family, together with the Cuban, had left Roseton for parts unknown.

"'Twas a very queer little episode," said the editor, upon his return. "But I can't see that it brings any grist to the *News*, unless ye write it all up. Ye owe the paper that much, me boy, and me too, bedad."

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A CONTEST OF WITS.

THE village of Aygalades is pretty enough on week-days, but it is on Sundays that it is seen at its best. Nestled, as you know, on a mountain slope close to Marseilles, placed neither too high nor too low, looking out over the sea without actually being on its border, it appears from a distance to be buried in a mass of small trees, which quite overshadow it.

You would suppose, I am quite sure, that the people of this quiet corner of the earth, with their lovely sky, their sunshine, and their famous fish soup, would have no great ambition for talking politics. Yet they do, the foolish fellows! And it was precisely about a matter of politics they were discussing one fine Sunday—some question concerning Society at large—as they were seated face to face at one of the tables in Mother Germanos' arbour, that the two oldest friends in Aygalades—friends of thirty years' standing, neither more nor less, Joséphin the postman, and stout Josué, the farmer of Ile-aux-Cébes—almost came to blows, so that it was necessary to separate them after one of those terrible Southern disputes in which the combatants become enemies for life, never speaking to each other or visiting each other again.

Strong language had been used.

"*Canaille!*" Josué had said.

"Old villain!" the postman had retorted.

You will say that every day in political disputes things like these may be said between old friends, such as they were. Perhaps so. But on Sunday! And before all the people who were there! That settled it. Without another word, without a gesture, the farmer set out for Ile-aux-Cébes.

Then between these two men there began one of those half-concealed, but implacable warfares that are much like the gentle fine rain which falls almost imperceptibly and silently in winter at Aygalades (and, perhaps, elsewhere), and which, little by little, without one's noticing it, in the end soaks one to the bone. Every day, in his tiresome round through the forest, Joséphin stopped, sometimes at one house, sometimes at another. People would give him drink and engage him in talk. Naturally, the constant subject of discussion was his quarrel with the farmer, and once his glass of wine finished, there were always execrations and heavy blows of the fist on the table, always the same evil predictions. "He will end his days in the penitentiary; he will never die in his own bed!"

The farmer, on his part, did not rush about from place to place, but in his thick peasant head he evolved a very neat means of avenging himself on his former friend.

This Ile-aux-Cébes, where he occasionally lived, is quite out of the world—at least six or seven miles from Aygalades. It is—once you get there—a pleasant enough corner of the country to look at, with its tilled land, its vineyards rising row upon row upon the hillside, and above all its *cébes* (edible mushrooms), such as you can find nowhere else. But to get there at all over the stony mountain paths is by no means an easy matter. This the farmer knew very well, but it was in this way that he expected to worry his former friend Joséphin.

The next day after their combat, abandoning his little *château* at Aygalades, he went to live for good and all at Ile-aux-Cébes, and every day he arranged to have sent to him by a friend in Marseilles a package or a letter—no matter what, even a blank paper in an envelope—so as to compel the unhappy postman to make that terrible trip, and to add those six miles in the sun and dust to the fatigue already sustained by his wearied limbs.

Joséphin was altogether too proud to complain; he did not flinch. Heaven knows, notwithstanding, what rage was in his heart. Not only this terrible fatigue every day, but, besides that, the jeers of the country people that he felt sure were being uttered all around him—for in a village like this people are not over-delicate, and the fine joke which the farmer had evolved struck everybody as highly amusing—all this was bad enough, but what was worst of all for Joséphin was to hear, when toward noon he arrived at Ile-aux-Cébes, and stood enduring the jeering looks of the farm hands coming up to their dinner, the deep voice of his former friend, Josué, crying mockingly to his servant-maid:

"Here! run downstairs, Annette; I think there is some mail for us again."

As long as the fine weather lasted, the postman stood it pretty well; but when cold weather began, and the paths were covered with frost, the poor wretch could hardly endure it any longer, and when one morning he slipped on the rocks, wet with the dew, and almost fell into a ravine, he determined to beg for mercy—not from his enemy, you may be sure, but from his official chief in the postal service, who, moved by his complaint, and recognising that this six mile's walk daily evidently constituted an extra and supplementary duty, gave him his choice of having an assistant granted him to make the trips to Ile-aux-Cébes, or of himself receiving forty sous by way of indemnity every time he had to take a letter to the farmer.

Joséphin did not hesitate; he chose the forty sous. He did this not so much from the love of gain, as you might suppose, but because he was resolved on revenge—and it certainly was a fine revenge that he had. When it became known in the country round about that his trip to Ile-aux-Cébes brought him in forty sous additional, there was a general admiration of the postman's cleverness; and public opinion, so easy to shift from side to side, now made sport of the stout old farmer. "Decidedly," people said, "Joséphin is the more cunning of the two."

And this he proved still better a few days afterward, when Josué, who was quite crushed, suppressed his daily letters from Marseilles, naturally supposing that he would thus cut off the supplies from his enemy. For Joséphin, by one of those strokes of genius which down in that country seem born with people, subscribed in the farmer's name to a little Marseilles newspaper, and every day carried a copy of it to Ile-aux-Cébes, thus continuing to gain his indemnity of forty sous in spite of his enemy. Now, indeed, Joséphin was regarded as a great man.

And, really it was a sight worthy of the gods to see him trotting steadily along the road with his most deliberate gait, whistling as he went, and describing circles in the air with his hollywood walking-stick. And when he arrived at the little entrance to the farm, still as before at the hour of noon, and in the presence of the same farm hands whose mocking looks were now turned toward their employer, he would in his turn cry out—

"Here! Just run down here a minute, Annette. I think there is some mail for you again."

There was no reason why this should not continue indefinitely; and, in fact, if I may believe Mariù, of the inn in the lower town, whose story I am faithfully transcribing, the great quarrel did last all summer and all winter. It was only in the spring time that they concluded peace, one clear April day when there was nothing but good in the air. It was very simple, very touching. The stout Josué in time had become interested in the paper which came to him in this odd way every day; so he would go down to look for it himself. The postman usually threw it on a table. This particular morning, without thinking, he handed it to the farmer. Their hands touched.

"Joséphin!"

"Josué!"

And since then you may see them both, as I have—a good deal older, to be sure, for this tale is already one of the distant past—again engaged on the square before the church in their games of bowling, and highly respected at Aygalades, and all the country through, because they were clever enough to gain through their quarrel—the one a paper that cost him nothing, the other forty sous a day from the Government; for I need not tell you that the paper continues to arrive every day, and that also every day Joséphin takes it to the farm.

But now Josué comes half way to meet him, and the two friends arrive at Ile-aux-Cébes tranquilly reading together the serial story in the paper, and comfortably seated in the farmer's carriage; while at the house the old servant Annette, and the farm hands—now full of respect for both—await them with the still smoking fish soup ready on the table.

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The Hairless Tiger.

"WHAT do you think of him?"

"Horrible!"

"Is he not a beauty?"

"Ugh! A look at those white, glassy eyes is enough to make one's blood turn to ice. Whatever possessed you to have such a monster mounted?"

Colonel Bob Downing laughed at my plainly expressed horror of the terrible beast he had set up in his smoking-room—a creature more repulsive even than in life, because of the taxidermist's faithful reproduction of a most suggestively ferocious and cruel expression on the face of the stuffed animal.

"I had him set up there, Taylor, because of the associations," said Colonel Downing finally. "But for the Great Jhoot Demon I should have still been knocking about the world a confirmed bachelor instead of being comfortably settled here in London with the nicest little wife that ever man had."

"You told me there was an interesting story connected with your marriage," I observed.

"It is interesting and highly dramatic," he went on. "Light your cigar and take that easy chair, so that you can keep the monster in view. It'll be a realistic aid to your imagination as my history of how I won Mrs. Downing develops itself. Now make yourself as comfortable as possible."

I adopted his suggestion, and never in my life did I listen to a story with such interest.

Every word thrilled me, and I could well imagine myself an actor in the whole drama, and fancy that the lifeless beast within touch of my hand was alive and again the murderous demon of an Indian jungle.

Just before the Colonel began, I noticed that a small monkey, which had before escaped my attention, was perched among the limbs of a dwarf tree in front of the demon, that the taxidermist had used to give his subject a more lifelike pose.

I realised that the monkey was part of the picture, for its grinning face was turned toward the demon, and clinging to the limb with one paw, it had the other extended, as though pointing to something ahead.

"What has the monkey to do with it, Colonel?" I asked, my curiosity aroused.

"The lungoor? You shall hear. He plays a very important part in the story."

With this assurance I was forced to be content, and, settling himself in his chair, the Colonel began.

As an enthusiastic scientist and mighty hunter, he had travelled over every part of the globe, his wanderings having been chiefly in the wildest and most inaccessible portions of our planet.

Three years ago, while in search of a peculiar plant which grows only in the deepest of East Indian jungles, and which he was employed to hunt up and secure specimens of, for a celebrated inventor, who wished to experiment on the use of the pith of the plant in some electrical contrivance, the Colonel found himself at Ramgargh, a Bengalese village at the foot of the Behar mountains.

Here he was the guest of an ex-army officer, Edward Meaney, whose beautiful daughter, Katharine, made a deep impression on the Colonel's susceptible heart.

To use his own description, "she was a woman among women, courageous, gentle, kind, sensible, and accomplished."

The major was the owner of an extensive plantation, situated about sixteen miles from Ramgargh, where he had a very comfortably appointed bungalow, in which he lived a portion of the time, his only companion being his beautiful daughter.

Major Meaney had a smattering of botanical knowledge, and when his guest described the plant of which he was in search, the Major said:

"I think that I have met with it while hunting for the Jhoot Demon, in a dense jungle that lies to the south-west of my place."

"Hunting the what!" demanded the Colonel, whose sporting instincts were aroused at the very mention of the name of a creature of which he had never before heard.

"What do you think of him?"

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"The Jhoot Demon."

"And what in the name of all that is horrible is a Jhoot Demon?"

"It's the name the natives have given to an enormous man-eating tiger which is the terror of the whole country."

"Ever got a shot?"

"Never."

"I'll try my luck," said the Colonel carelessly. "I'll combine business with pleasure. When I'm hunting for this plant I'll look up his demonship."

"Be careful that the demon does not look you up instead," continued Major Meaney.

"Nonsense. I'm not an ordinary shikari (tiger hunter), but a man who has slain over a hundred of the beasts."

"That's exactly what poor Dick Culverton said, and Dick shot over fifty tigers in twelve months once, for a wager."

"And did the tiger get him?"

"Yes. In the past ten years the tiger has killed every shikari, native or European, who went out against him. He has never even been seen, and, as he never mangles a body, but only sucks the blood through an orifice made over the jugular vein, the terror that the Jhoot Demon has inspired is not surprising. He does not confine himself to jungle man-hunting, and, although he never forces a door, he has got into house after house. Last March he killed two of my servants, and a third, who was lying beside them, was not even awakened."

"You excite my interest."

"I shall do well if I develop your caution. Before I went on half-pay, I was in command of a cantonment which was pitched on what is now my plantation. Two of my subalterns—likely lads—went out for him, and the next day were found dead like the rest."

"Boys are proverbially careless."

"Doubtless. One of the poor lads, with his last strength, had managed to scratch in the soft ground, the words: 'Look out for a L——.' But no amount of conjecture could solve the riddle of this uncompleted sentence."

"I shall certainly make it my business to hunt up the demon."

"Poor Dick Culverton left a message also, as creepy and mysterious as that written by the boy. He had managed before life left him, to grasp a twig which was found in his stiffened fingers, and with this rude pen had written in the sand two letters only before his strength failed him.

"Those letters?"

"A M——" answered the Major.

Far into the night, Major Meaney talked of the Jhoot Demon, its cunning, its ferocity, its murderous rapacity, and the Colonel nodded his head, and more firmly than ever resolved to hunt the terror of the jungle to his death.

The day following they set out for the plantation—the Colonel, Major Meaney, and Miss Katharine.

The bungalow was built close to a palm thicket, and the Colonel was given an end room, the windows of which, protected only by a mosquito netting, overlooked this grove.

The front corner room was occupied by Katharine Meaney, and as all were weary from their day's journey over the rough roads, they retired early.

There was a full moon, and the Colonel, arrayed only in his pajamas, seated himself at the window to smoke a cheroot before retiring.

His feet were elevated on the low sill, and he was gazing dreamily out toward the palm grove, when there was an almost inaudible rustle of leaves among some low shrubbery which grew close to the bungalow, and looking sharply in that direction, he saw a little grey brown paw very cautiously putting aside the twigs.

Behind the paw he could discern two small green eyes attentively regarding him.

"A lungoor!" he muttered to himself, as it vanished from view. "A monkey."

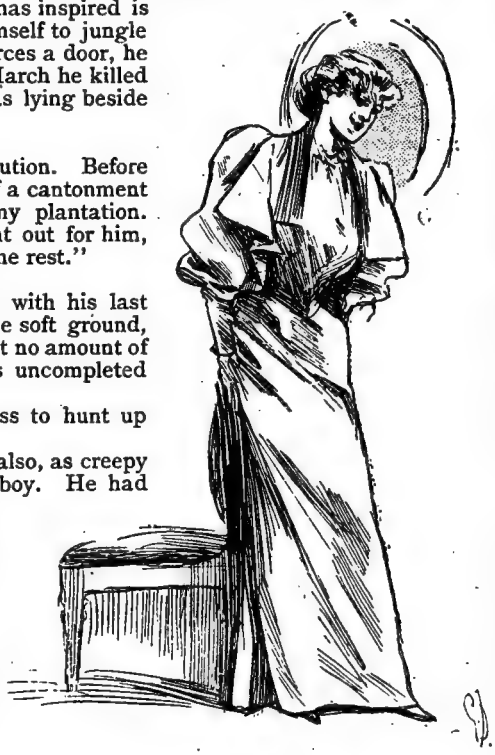
Then he sprang suddenly but noiselessly to his feet, and his whole frame quivered with excitement.

"A lungoor—a monkey!" he repeated, in a whisper. "What was the message that poor lad left? 'Look out for a L——' a lungoor, he meant. And Culverton's two enigmatical letters written with the twig as he lay dying, 'A M——.' A monkey he meant. By George! There's mischief afloat!"

Moved by a sudden inspiration, for which he could never afterwards account, he picked up one of his heavy express rifles, both barrels of which were charged with explosive ball, and opening the door of his room stepped out into the wide verandah that encircled the bungalow.

A mass of creepers growing up to the thatched roof afforded him a place of shelter, from which he could keep his eye on the shrubbery and command a view of the windows of Katharine Meaney's room.

He had scarcely got himself into position when the lungoor hopped out into the clearing, the shrubbery shook, and there followed the little creature one of the most repulsive monsters his eyes had ever beheld.



Katharine.

It was a gigantic tiger, absolutely naked, not a hair anywhere—a huge, ghostly monstrosity—a very Caliban of tigers.

As the ghostly creature crept after the monkey, he followed the slightest curve and deviation of his guide with the delicate alacrity of a needle under the influence of a magnet.

The monkey crossed the little cleared place and made straight toward one of the windows of the room occupied by Kate Meaney, alongside of which was the beautiful girl's bed.

Holding his breath, Colonel Downing followed with wide staring eyes the movements of the two strange companions.

The adroitness displayed by the tiger was suddenly converted into a subject of horrified wonder, for, as the brute approached the window behind which lay the sleeping girl, he turned his hideous face up to the moon, and the watcher, standing breathless among the sheltering creepers, saw that his eyes were of a dull white, without light, intelligence, or movement.

The creature was stone blind, but, for all that, evidently knew what lay before him, for the saliva of anticipation was clinging to his wrinkled jaws like a mass of gleaming icicles.

The monkey, when it had come within jumping distance, gave a low signal cry, made one vigorous spring through the window upon Kate's bed, and then leaped upon the head-board.

The little guide was instantly followed by the tiger, but, while his huge, hairless body was in mid-air, the Colonel's express rifle rang out.

The tiger uttered a scream of agony, his great fore-paws dug at the air viciously, and his huge body fell with a crash upon the floor of the verandah.

The monkey, with a shill cry, sought to escape, but a ball from the second barrel stretched it lifeless beside the dead body of the Jhoot Demon.

It is no wonder, then, that, seeing the interest he had excited in the beautiful girl's heart, the Colonel pressed his suit, and was rewarded, before many days, by becoming her accepted husband.

The native servants carefully removed the skins of the demon and his monkey guide, and, as I glanced toward their stuffed forms, when the Colonel rose and announced that lunch awaited us, I could not repress a shudder of horror.

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A SISTER'S TREACHERY.

SIX o'clock. The hands at John Pilborough's factory stood ready with their shawls and bonnets on waiting for the signal of dismissal, and, when the clamour of the noisy bell broke on the air, they were out in the streets of Lowell, pushing, jostling, hurrying like a flock of frightened sheep released from bondage.

The crowd dispersed in twos and threes, but Margaret Miller walked apart. There was no companionship for her in all that noisy throng, no companionship in all the wide world. A strange life for so young a woman to lead, but those who would win love must earn it, and Margaret neither wished nor courted human sympathy.

There had been but one bright spot in all the dull years. One drop of honey in her cup of life, and that had turned to bitterest gall.

Margaret at seventeen had been a wonderful beauty, and her great black eyes and peach colour had caught the fancy of John Pilborough's son, who had taken no pains to conceal his admiration, but sought her company whenever it was possible.

At last it grew a common thing for him to walk beside her in the winter twilight, on the road that lay between the factory and her home, and these walks were the events of Margaret's life, and there were tender whisperings that would have been highly disapproved of by the young man's prudent father had they come to his ears.

Margaret grew very gentle in those days. It was so sweet to think that someone watched for her coming when the weary day's work was over, that someone thought of her when she was absent. So sweet to know that someone loved her, that she was tender to all the world for that one's sake.

The girls began to grow fonder of Margaret, and some, even when they guessed the secret of the change, clung to her still, while others were filled with envy and spite toward the girl who was no better than they, yet aspired to the friendship of their employer's son.

But all this came to a sudden end, and Margaret never knew the reason. She could only guess that the young man's father objected to their intercourse, for he had met them once or twice together. They parted as tenderly as ever, but there was no leave-taking, and shortly after Arthur Pilborough left his native town, and for five long years she had heard no more of him. This love, which had seemed so much to her, was with him but an idle fancy.

But there had been a nine days' wonder and gossip about young Pilborough and Margaret Miller, and Margaret resented this, and was more shy than ever of the girls who had so concerned themselves with her affairs. Those who disliked her increased in their dislike, and those who would have been kind to her grew tired of kindness which met with no return.

The days were so like one another. She would go home to eat and sleep; perhaps spend an hour or two over her sewing, silent, while others talked of things that were less than nothing to her. But this day was destined to be unlike all the others.

There was a letter awaiting her, a letter bordered in black and signed Bessie Miller, the sister from whom she had parted many years before.

It told of the death of the old uncle who had adopted her, and offered, nay forced on Margaret's acceptance an equal share of the fortune which had fallen to his adopted child when his affairs were all arranged.

"And Margaret," said the writer, "you are my darling sister, though I have forgotten even how you looked when they took us from each other. I have loved you all my life long, and you must come and live with me and we shall be happy together."

And Margaret went.

It was a snowy day in winter, when Margaret alighted at the house that was to be her home. Bessie flew to meet her. Standing at the portal with her golden hair blown backward from her smiling face, and a welcome spoken with lips and eyes and outstretched hands, she looked to Margaret's eyes like an angel at the gates of Paradise.

When the first greeting was over, Margaret and Bessie sat together before the fire, talking of the past. Margaret in a great armchair, and Bessie on a little ottoman at her feet. They were as different as sisters could be. One tall, dark, and stately; the other a diminutive blonde with a fairylike figure, and full of life and motion, and pretty winning ways.

As they sat there, deep in reminiscences, Bessie fell to caressing her sister's hand with hers, patting them softly against her rosy cheeks, and Margaret feeling the gentle touch, looked down and thought with a sudden pang, how different they were. Those tiny rose-tipped fingers made her own look so large and coarse.

"They have the factory stamp on them, Bessie," said the elder sister, and Bessie who had been thinking of anything rather than this, blushed with embarrassment, and then sprang from her seat and threw her arms round her sister's neck for the hundredth time.

But Margaret stood before her mirror that night, and laughed a bitter laugh.

"The stamp of the factory is on me," she said. "Money can never give me back what I have lost. She might have been the drudge and I the lady with soft white hands, but for the merest chance."

But the morning brought better thoughts. No one could long have lived with Bessie Miller without partaking somewhat of her happy nature. She was a living sunbeam, a creature like the birds and flowers, rejoicing that she lived; but underneath her gaiety there was a well of pure, deep feeling which Margaret could not understand.

One evening the two were sitting alone; the elder idly dreaming—she was always idle now—the younger planting roses in a barren field of canvas.

"Margaret," said Bessie in a voice that was scarcely more than a breath, "I have something to tell you I wanted to tell you before."

Margaret laughed and roused herself to listen. One look at the blue eyes glowing like winter stars, the little mouth quivering with its tender smile, told Margaret what the "something" was.

"Come, Bessie, and tell me all about it now. Better late than never."

So Bessie left her needle in a half-blown rose and nestled in her favourite seat at Margaret's feet.

"Margaret," said she, "someone likes me"; then hid her crimson face in Margaret's draperies.

"How strange!" said the other, laughing. "Is that all?"

This time Bessie drew her sister down to her with both her hands, and whispered in her ear as though it were a guilty secret that she was engaged to be married, and the day was settled.

"And who is the happy man?" said Margaret. "Who am I to have for a brother-in-law?"

Just then the door bell rang, and Bessie sprang to her former position as two gentlemen were announced.

"Mr. Pilborough," Margaret heard the servant say, and the name came to her like a voice from the buried past. She could have prayed it might not be the one whom she had known.

But there he stood, not greatly changed. She had ceased to care for him, yet she could not feel to him as to a stranger. It seemed like living in a dream to hear his voice and touch his hand again.

Of all else that passed that evening Margaret was unconscious. His voice was the only one that had a meaning to her. She wondered at first if he had recognised her, changed as she was and in her altered circumstances. But she found that he remembered all. He spoke of their former intercourse as a boy and girl friendship, and totally ignored the manner of their parting.

But his voice was low and tender, and his eyes were the eyes of the olden time, and Margaret felt the influence of other days creeping over her, and knew that he wished she should. Meanwhile Bessie chatted and laughed with the stranger, and these two talked of the long ago.

"How do you like him?" said the younger sister, when the gentlemen had taken their departure.

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"Like him? Why, Bessie, I am ashamed to say, I hardly noticed what he was like. You know most of my observation was taken up with Mr. Pilborough. We are old friends, and we had a great deal to say."

"Why, what are you thinking of, Margaret? It is Arthur I mean. Did I not tell you? I gave you ample opportunity to make his acquaintance."

And Bessie laughed her merry joyous laugh at her sister's astonished countenance.

But Margaret rose up fierce and angry.

"I hate him!" she cried; "and I hate you!" she might have added, for the thought was in her heart. But Bessie, pale and trembling, put her hand upon the angry lips.

"Oh! tell me what is the matter, sister, darling sister," she pleaded, and Margaret, frightened at her own angry words, stood still and thought how she could mend them.

"Has my Arthur done anything wrong—anything to offend you?"

Margaret made no answer; she would have given worlds to recall the hasty breath, but she was forced to tell the story at last. And her sister listened with tearful eyes. Inconstancy seemed such a terrible thing to this faithful heart.

"Margaret," said she, "I can never marry Arthur now."

But Margaret begged her to forget what she had told her, and they parted for the night with fond embraces.

Alone in her own chamber, Bessie thought till the morning broke.

He was Margaret's first love as he was her's; but, perhaps, it had not been as Margaret thought; perhaps it had been but a boyish fancy, and Arthur must not suffer if his happiness depended on herself. Come what might, she resolved to do her duty unselfishly and cheerfully. Poor Margaret, she had had but little sweetness in her life. It might be that Arthur had loved her truly in those early days and had only forsaken her upon compulsion.

So ended her meditation. Time passed on, and day by day she watched the two, and saw, or thought she saw, that they loved each other still, and as this conviction forced itself upon her, Arthur Pilborough's image faded from her breast.

He who knoweth all things could alone know the secret of that innocent heart. If she suffered she gave no sign, and Margaret, guessing nothing of what was passing in her sister's mind, and believing her happy in Arthur's love, felt all the old bad feelings return with double force, and set herself the task of winning Arthur Pilborough's love, scarcely thinking of the end of her triumph, but resolved to punish him in some way for the unhappiness he had caused her.

She strove her best to fascinate and dazzle him, and he, quite willing to be entertained by a handsome woman, entered with zest into a flirtation, all the while reserving such love as he possessed for the one who was to be his wife.

But in all this Bessie only saw the signs of feeling that could not be repressed, and one day, when the two were sitting together, she came and sat beside Pilborough with a resolute look in her earnest blue eyes.

"Arthur," she said, "the day that has been fixed for our wedding is close at hand, but I must say what I have to say before that time."

She begged of her sister not to leave them, and then, in a clear, steady voice, she told Arthur Pilborough her feelings had changed, that she no longer felt any stronger regard than friendship, and that she hoped he would try to forgive and forget her. She hinted of no change in him, of no reason for the alteration in her feeling, and Arthur, utterly abashed, knowing well what cause he had given her, listened in silence, tongue-tied in Margaret's presence.

Next morning there came to the door a missive in Arthur's hand addressed to Bessie Miller. As the letter was placed in Margaret's hand she stood in her dressing-room, holding her sister's costly wedding dress.

There was no question of right or wrong, only a mad determination to know of all that passed between Bessie and Arthur Pilborough. Margaret opened the letter and read what was never meant for her eyes—tender, penitent words, warm with the love for which she would have bartered her existence. Pleading humbly for forgiveness, for that heart which he had lost through his own misdeeds, and through and under it all a hint, not anywhere written but subtly expressed, that the fault was not all his own.

A light step sounded along the passage, and Margaret tore the paper with an angry hand and cast it at her feet, crushing it under the folds of the snowy satin.

Bessie looked in, and seeing what she held cried out:

"Oh, Margaret, please put the dress away, and never let me see it again."

Margaret laid dress and paper away in an unused drawer. But for the confession it involved of her own treachery she might even yet have given her sister the letter; but, as it was, she said to herself that Arthur Pilborough might make his peace in his own way.

That night Arthur bent over Bessie with his whole soul in his eyes, and asked her if she had anything new to say.

"I have not changed my mind," she said, quite coldly, and Arthur went, vowing never to enter the house again.

For a time the sisters saw no more of him. They ceased even to speak of him, but after a time Margaret met him frequently, and Bessie knew of the meetings, and was glad that all had come to pass as she had planned, and would have been as gay and happy as ever but for a sudden illness that came upon her.

It was heart-disease, the doctor said, and a sudden shock might be her death, but with care she might recover. So Bessie gave up all pleasure that tended to excitement, and remained at home to guard her health.

One night there was a party to the opera proposed by a lady at whose house Margaret and Arthur Pilborough frequently met. Both the sisters were invited, but Bessie pleaded illness.

"Come and see me when you get home. I'll be sure to be awake," and Margaret left her with a kiss.

That evening Arthur sat beside Margaret in the crowded opera house, and in the pauses of the music asked her to make him happy with the promise of her hand; and Margaret promised, regardless of her revenge, reckoning little whether pique or love had made him so soon forget her sister, for this was the anniversary of Bessie's proposed wedding-day.

He assisted her from the carriage on their return, and with his last touch on her hand, his last word on her ear, Margaret sped up the stairs to her own room. At Bessie's door she paused and looked within. The shutter was open wide, and the long curtain, loosened from its fastenings, blew half across the room, the gaslight flickered and flared, and on the floor lay a heap of snowy satin and lace, her sister's discarded wedding dress.

Margaret's pulses stood still. There was but a step from her to the bed that was hidden by its massive head-board, but that step seemed a yawning gulf. It was taken, and there lay pretty Bessie, the colour fled for ever from her lips and cheeks, her little fingers clasping fast a tattered paper—the paper Margaret knew so well.

Her sister had loved and trusted her with a boundless love and faith, and the knowledge of Margaret's treachery had pierced that tender heart as absolutely as though the cruel hand had held a murderous knife. For a moment Margaret hoped that she was dying too, but the horror that swept her frame left her alive to remorse and agony, it seemed to her for ever more.

When Arthur Pilborough came to look upon the lifeless form, the love that had been the purest feeling of his heart, came back to overwhelm him with a hopeless sorrow.

"Oh, Bessie! little Bessie!" he cried; "I loved you better than my life!"

There was no word of explanation, of leave-taking between Margaret and her old time lover; but the two looked into each other's eyes and knew that they must part.

They never met again. Margaret is an aged woman now. The world died to her with Bessie's death, and life since then has been a long, unceasing penance; but sometimes in her dreams she sees her sister's radiant form and hears her voice, not stern or angry, not reproachful, but pleading gently for her sinful sister, forgiving and pitiful as in her life. And Margaret, full of contrition and penitence, looks forward not quite despairingly to the life beyond.

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THE MAN MY SISTER MARRIED.

SUMMARY—Chapters I. to VII.

The story is told by Violet (Letty) Lombard, who, at the opening, is living at Galveston, U.S.A. with her grandfather, Enos Lombard, Liz the coloured servant, Justina her old nurse, and her Aunt Marg, who has been the recipient of mysterious letters, post-marked New Orleans, necessitating a fortnight's absence from home. John Scott, who married Katherine, Violet's step-sister, a very beautiful girl, pays for Violet's board and lodging, and has just decided that she is to go to a convent in New Orleans. On the strength of information gained from the torn pieces of one of Aunt Marg's letters, and curious to solve the mystery, Violet so arranges that she goes to New Orleans a day earlier, and that she stops at the Hotel Gilbert. Through a crack in the wall, she sees what happens in the next room to hers. John Scott, Captain Dana—an old friend from Galveston—Aunt Marg, and others are sitting in judgment upon a Mexican, Antonio, who has, it transpires, assisted in the seizure of Scott's wife, and of Dana's wife and daughter, and whose terrible crime has been brought to light by Yara, a spy. Antonio is compelled to end his life by taking poison, with his dying words laying the blame upon one Xarras.

Letty goes to the convent in the morning, and during her schooldays there clandestinely meets James Gregory, who is introduced as the son of a friend of her grandfather's. On her way home again, some months later, with her chaperone Miss Wilson, Colonel Dean Gregory, James's brother, introduces himself. After that, Letty sees a great deal of James, and at length promises to elope with him. Whilst waiting for him to come, she overhears Dean Gregory telling a friend of a plot whereby he has won James over, and has made it probable that John Scott's money will come to himself instead of to Letty.

* * * * * *

CHAPTER VIII.

"LETTY," he said thickly—I saw that he had been drinking, for his voice was unsteady, his manner wild—"what kind of game were you trying to play on me? It is two o'clock, and I have waited since twelve. Where did you find that old fool?"

I dropped the captain's arm, while he stood there, silently regarding us both, and looked at Jim with a hopeless air.

"You will wait for ever for me, Jim," I stammered. "I have changed my mind; I am going home."

"Do you think one of your conscience spells will change me?" he went on rudely. "I know you and your moods too well. You said to-night you would run away with me, and I hold you to your word." He started towards me, but Captain Dana interposed.

"I can hold you back, old as I am, and give her a chance to run," he said sternly. "She's as fleet-footed as a deer. I want you to talk it over, fair and square, but no roughness, Jim Gregory, and I tell you she has come to her right senses."

"It is too late," said Jim, with white lips. "You old idiot, I would not hurt her. She came of her own accord. This is all acting. Why, she wrote me herself that she would come. There is no need of hysterics on your part!"

Then I remembered my silly letters. I would have given a year of my life to have never written one. "I shall never go with you Jim," I said timidly.

"You must think me a chump, Miss Lombard. It's a duty I owe to society to show what sort you are. I have some pretty letters of yours too——"

"You think that will make John Scott break his will," I said coolly. "Oh, you miserable cur! What good will that do you? Don't you guess that he reads you? I defy you to do your worst."

Then I dragged the captain away. "That was wrong, Letty," he said feebly; "you should not set him on, for there's only old, helpless folks to stand between you and the world. I see evil days for you like many a poor girl has lived through that was foolish like you." He wrung my hand at parting, and I went softly through the hall. Our doors were seldom locked. At the foot of the stairs I stopped by the old clock and laid my cheek against the case. Then and there I, silly, repentant Letty Lombard, kissed the senseless wood as fondly as I ever touched a human being's lips.

"Home safe, because you lied to me, old friend," I thought; "because you are three, when it is only two o'clock; because you were morning when it was night. When I was a tiny, fearing child, I used to think a witch dwelt in your shining case. Now I know it was a good fairy, who watched over me until the time of helping came."

Oh, my white little room! The scent of the flowers that, warm from my breast, I had flung on my bed before I went; my gown, with a half-shaped outline of me to it, and all the carelessly-flung-about pretty knick-knacks I loved to have about me! How peaceful everything seemed, and how secure that shelter which I had scorned. I sank on my knees by the bed. Whenever I feel so lost and friendless, my heart goes back to my prayers at Aunt Marg's knee, and I cry to that one Friend she taught me to love.

But as I prayed I grew afraid. Something had gone from my spirit, a touch had blackened the white petals of my life. I had not been guilty, but what would the world say? I got up and shut the window, drew the key inside and locked my door, and in a perfect frenzy looked in every place where a person might hide.

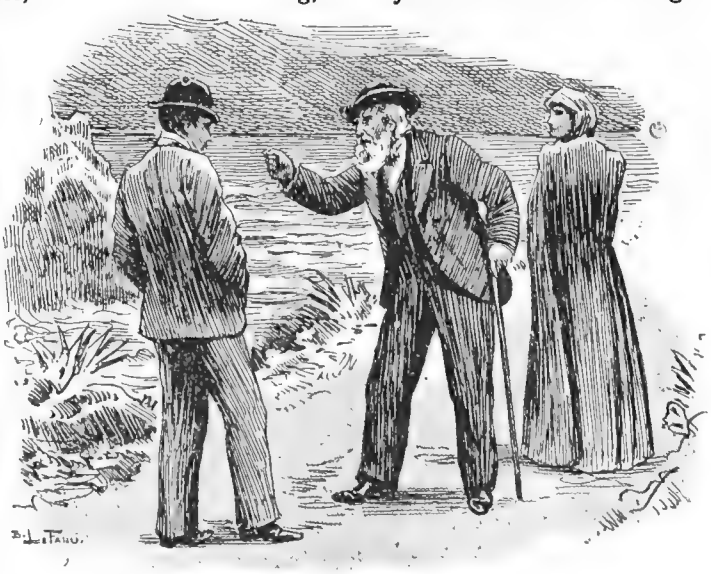
I felt no longer safe, nor did I sleep until it was almost day, and a faint rosy tinge had softened the dark shadows of fog and night. Then I dreamed that John Scott came to me and gave me a white camelia, its petals foully stained and black.

"I told you years ago that this would come," he said gently; "you will never be white again."

In the days that followed, I saw Jim Gregory kept his word, and though a reputation dies so hard when it must be poisoned by microscopic doses to screen the murderer, mine went into the shadow of death.

I travelled in the valley of humiliation. Men looked at me rudely. Some women who had been kind to me did not see me when we met, and the girls I used to associate with hardly answered my greeting. Dean Gregory used to say some insolent pleasantry when he met me, that I could have killed him for in my helpless anger. Justina said she had heard from some Mexican sailors that my name had been mentioned lightly in a low bar-room by Gregory, and a friend of hers had flung a glass at him. "It did not kill him," said Justina mournfully.

Then one afternoon I received a letter from the pastor of the church where I sang, that my services would be no longer



"I can hold you back, old as I am.

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I laid my cheek against the case.

required. A small city is like a country town in the matter of scandal and gossip, and what assassin's weapons both are! I like better the Mexican's knife, one can sometimes dodge that, but from venomous tongues there is no escape.

I went straight to the pastor's study and wondered, when I did so, if his wife would scold him for hurting his character by receiving me. I have such a way of thinking things in all my troubles. He told me gently he did not believe any of the stories. He admitted there were some; his wife had mentioned them; but he never listened to gossip; but the lady members of the choir objected to me.

"Well," I said calmly, "I am punished for looking on church just as a recreation; luckily I never did look to it for any comfort."

"Set-backs like this, such talk from young people whom we are powerless to aid, is what hurts ministers of the gospel most to-day," he said sadly; "we seem to be hampered from doing what we wish at every turn."

"By the lady members," I said wickedly.

He half smiled. "There are certain influences we cannot withstand; and believe me, Miss Violet, that, though I know you have been sadly imprudent, I am sure you are a good, true woman, and I want you to come to church just the same. Facing scandal bravely often silences it, and in time we will have you in your old place in the choir; the other singers are very nice, but a little narrow."

"The narrowness of good women and men is what keeps your pews unfilled to-day," I said recklessly. "To aid the multitude you must go back to open-air meetings. You shut the doors of your churches on sinners. I am going down to the sailors' Bethel to sing on Sunday. There are women there who are trying to lead better lives, and yet you could not induce them to set foot in your church because of the scornful looks of your narrow lady members."

"I think, out of your anger, good may come to the Bethel," he said kindly. He was such a pleasant gentleman, and I was ashamed afterwards of my silly talk. "You sing so sweetly; our hymns will have a truer meaning to their hearts and make them better."

Half angry, half pleased, I went home, where, as I sat by the window, cooling my flushed face, I heard grandfather talking to Captain Dana in the porch. My name, uttered in his angriest manner, caught my attention.

"You can't take up for Letty. I tell you, Dana, you are wrong. You must not make her quarrel yours. What was Katherine? Think of the misery she caused, and how little it ever touched her. There is no good in Letty either. I am too old to worry and suffer over her ill-doing. Look at my son—blown with ev'ry wind, no comfort to himself or to me, and his girls were that way. Selfish, heartless, and wrong-headed, she never thanks Marg for that good woman's life of devotion to her, nor my giving her a home. John is the subject of her ridicule with young Gregory. He's her kind; let her abide with him."

"I never thought you such a hard man, Enos," quavered the captain.

"I'm too old to break colts, such bad stock too. Letty flirted with young Gregory; I saw that, and she can take her punishment. If only Liz will hold her tongue, for Marg must not be worried by the stories floating about. It would kill her. It's a pity that ungrateful girl didn't die when she was a baby."

"And Marg didn't know a word of the talk?" asked the captain.

"No. She don't seem to half belong to our world. But I fear it may come to her, try as we may. She sets such a store by Letty. Poor Mary! Her life was wrecked like a fine new ship, drifting on the bar on her first v'yage and going down. I've writ to John, but he ain't back from Mexico, and I sent the letter to New York. If he was there he'd have sent for her perhaps, and got her out o' town till the talk blew over, if it ever will."

"Poor little lass!" sighed the captain; and I loved him for that. I put on my hat and went softly down the stairs. Liz, acting under my grandfather's order, made no attempt nowadays to accompany me anywhere, and that fact used to hurt me. It seemed he thought I was no longer worth guarding or loving; that I had put myself beyond both.

I used to hate to have her watch over me, but now I could have cried for her to take that old friendly interest, to make me think myself not quite so evil. I knew John Scott was not in Mexico. I saw him ride by that day; and full of a desperate purpose, I went along the beach to the street leading to the mansion.

It was very quiet in the flower-scented yard. My steps echoed guiltily after me as I went up to the porch. The great mastiff John loves came to meet me. We were old friends. There was a light in Mr. Scott's study, so I rang the bell. Bruce came to the door, and, as he saw me, drew back as if he would shut me out. "Missus sed I wasn't to let yo' in," he muttered.

"Did Mr. Scott, my guardian, say so?" I asked defiantly.

"Deed he didn't," said Bruce, brightening up. "It's a wicked shame to act like dem two. I ain't no use for the Gregorys, Miss Vi'let. I allus liked yo', but yo' bin a leetle toppy lately when yo' comed here; doan seem to see me no mo' den the furnitoor. Dem ain't no quality ways, I tell yo'."

"Go on, Bruce," I said humbly "I deserve all the unkind things you can say."

"I'se dreffful sorry I sed dem, missy.

"Missus said I wasn't to let yo' in."

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Yo' got so pale and skeered lookin'. Bless yo', chile, Mars Scott set a store by yo'. He's in de dinin' room wif de kurnal and Jim. I'll fotch him out kinder sly, an' yo' step in de study. De ladies upstairs."

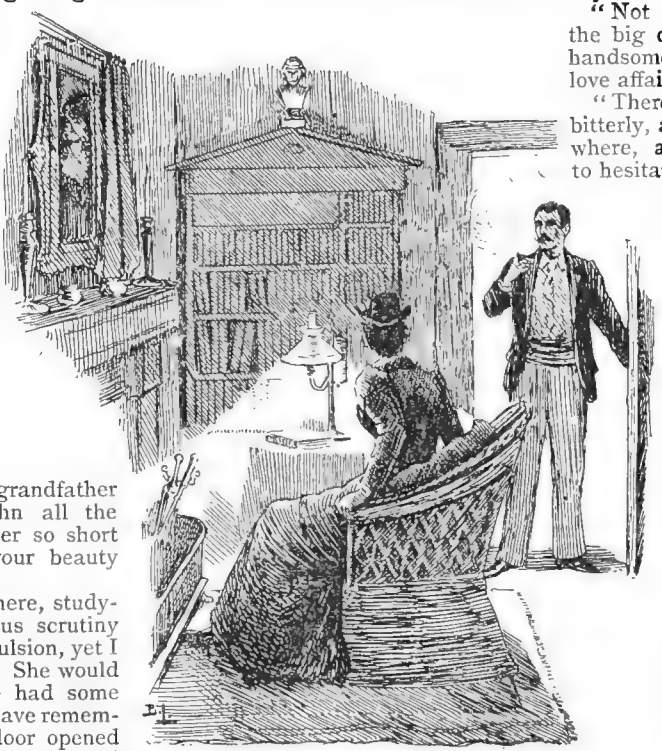
He closed the door behind me, and I stared curiously round the room, that had never been opened to Jim's and my explorations. Over the mantel hung a portrait. Once, when we looked in the blinds, I saw it veiled with a crimson plush curtain, and Jim said it was Katherine's, and John kept it covered. Now the curtain was drawn aside, and, I suppose, from the chair below the mantel, he had been sitting there looking at her.

She was worth a life's devotion, I thought then. Such a face! that glorious Spanish beauty: great dark eyes; clear, pale skin; features of perfect form and classic outline; a mouth made for kisses, full-lipped and rosy, pouting as if she would smile, for her eyes had already the merry light in them. Over her blue-black hair was a Spanish mantilla, half revealing her matchless shoulders and bosom, and falling over the sheen of her yellow satin gown. I fancied she loved rich, warm colours, none too glowing and brilliant for her beauty to cope with.

How proudly her head was set on her full round throat—not a large head either, but so well shaped, and her forehead low and broad, defied you to dare ask for intellect when beauty satisfied your every sense. I don't believe in high foreheads or narrow ones, despite Tennyson; I have seen some bald foreheaded women with their frizzes on the tops of their vacant heads, and all they knew was the last pattern in worsted work or tatting. As I looked, the eyes took on a mocking light; the lips a meaning smile.

"The artist knew you better than your husband," I thought; "that stranger read you as grandfather did. How did you blind John all the years, or were you only together so short a time that the glamour of your beauty held him enthralled?"

I forgot my errand as I sat there, studying that perfect face in jealous scrutiny and with a curious sense of repulsion, yet I knew I should have loved her. She would have understood me and have had some pity had she lived. She would have remembered her own youth. The door opened and the fragrance of a good cigar reached me as I started in my chair. I felt that my hour had come as I turned to meet Mr. John Scott.



I turned to meet Mr. John Scott.

CHAPTER IX.

"The idea of Bruce not telling me you were here," he said quickly; "he gets more useless every day. I kept you waiting, and you look so pale and worn." He did not offer me his hand, and sick at heart I thought he must already know all. He read my thoughts. "Remember you would not shake hands with me once," he smiled.

I held out my cold hand and he pressed it in his big warm, palm, and still holding me, led me in front of Katherine's picture.

"Don't contrast us," I pleaded, "it is not kind of you."

"You hold your own very well, Miss Jealousy, and are like and unlike her, the same mouth and chin."

"Oh, that is enough," I cried breathlessly, "I am more than satisfied; most women would be content with one of her perfect features, and you have given me two."

He laughed, drew the curtain across the painting, and brought me a chair. "There must be something direfully wrong, Letty, to bring you to your pet aversion."

"There is," I stammered, "and I need a friend, someone to be kind to me. I thought that you——" then the room grew suddenly dark, and I must have fainted, for when I remembered I was lying on the sofa by the open window, and he was bathing my forehead with some strong perfume, while Bruce, very scared and round eyed, stood staring at me.

"Where is my mother?" said Scott anxiously; "I sent you for her."

"Tel de troof, Mars John," answered Bruce uncomfortably, "dey bof down on de po chile."

"If anyone has hurt that little heart he shall answer to me," said John, with that metallic ring in his voice.

"It was my own doing," I said, sitting up and pushing my wet curls out of my eyes, "and I am all right now. I was so afraid to come, and all of a sudden I lost courage and sense too." The tears came then and I hid my face. Bruce quietly went out at a sign from John.

"Don't try to talk to-night, Violet," said John; "why not another day?"

"Because I can bear it no longer. Please sit there, and don't look at me nor say one word until I'm finished."

"Not a whisper," he smiled, taking the big chair near the sofa, shading his handsome eyes with his hand. "Is it a love affair, you poor little maid?"

"There was no love in it," I cried bitterly, and with many sobs and pauses where, ashamed and miserable, I had to hesitate, I told him the truth about my engagement to James Gregory and all our stolen meetings, and of my knight-errant, and what a friend he had been to me.

"You must destroy that will," I said. "I know you must. If you left me one coin it would haunt me; I am so unworthy of any one's kindness."

"You knew of my will?" he said sternly, then leaned forward and took my hand, holding it tight. "Tell me how you learnt that. You have kept something back. You only said you heard that talk by Justina's cottage. Who were the speakers?"

"That I will not tell you, Mr. Scott. I shall not bring you more trouble than I can help. That would not be your quarrel."

"Yet you said you were going to be honest."

"If you do not help me I will drown myself. I have got to the end of my tether. I am desperate."

"The will shall be destroyed," he said coldly; "but can you be honest? How much truth and how much falsehood is there in what you have told me?"

"It is all truth," I sobbed; and like the camelia, a rude touch has blackened the petals of my girl's life. I can never forget all he said, it stings me now when it comes back to torture me.

He rose and walked up and down the room; his hands behind him, his eyes on my face. "If I could believe you," he muttered.

"Don't," I cried recklessly, "be like the rest! Why I came here, I don't know. There is no pity in any man or woman. There is one road for me, and I am driven to it. I have the blame now, why not——."

"Hush!" he said, and came and took me by the shoulder as I stood there. "Don't soil your lips with such sentiments, or I shall side against you. You do look good, Letty. Your pure child's face, your innocent eyes; you would never have come to me if there had been wrong. I believe you, dear."

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He went to the bell. "Bruce, send Mr. James in here."

"I will not see him," I cried; "you shall not force me to. It is wicked, cruel. Is that the way you would help me?"

"Yes; what have you done that you must be a coward?"

I knew Bruce did not tell Jim that I was there, for he stopped short when he saw me, and half turned to escape.

"This isn't fair, Uncle John," he choked.

"I am glad you acknowledge it," said Scott quietly. "Now you see your victim it does put you in a bad light. It marks you for life as a cur and a sneak."

She gave me her hand with a polite little speech.

"I will not listen to this," cried Jim, with white lips.

"You will," said Scott, his back against the door.

"A great brute like you can bully," sneered Jim.

"Yes, and I have taken up Letty's cause. She has told me everything."

"Has she?" echoed Jim, with an indescribable accent; "everything?"

"You contemptible cub," said Scott, "I've a mind to take a whip to you."

"I am not one of your Mexican peons," cried Jim, "or one of the women they say you beat. If I haven't your strength I have arms with me."

"Don't draw that revolver, Jim," said Scott coolly, "for before you get it your arm will not be fit to handle it. Even if I beat my slaves, as you say, I think I would stand a better show than you do now. Pshaw! I won't quarrel with you. Now give me Letty's silly notes. All of them, and——"

"I don't propose to."

"Yes, you will, for I am going to buy you, Jim. You want to go to New York and start in business. Give me the letters and your word to say no more about Letty, never to mention her name, save in kindness, and I will help you as you and your mother wish. Refuse, and I will adopt my slave-driver methods. Truly, Jim, I am a better friend than enemy."

Jim pondered for fully five minutes, while Scott watched him quietly, with that mocking smile in his bright eyes and on his lips. Then Jim handed the packet of letters to him across the table. He always carried them with him for fear I might get them, with Bruce's assistance, if they were hid in the house, I suppose. Scott tossed them to me.

"They are all here," I faltered. "What shall I do with them?"

He took them from me, and Jim watched him with an ugly smile while I hung my head. If he read one of those silly, silly things, he would hate me. Scott, with a tender smile at me, flung them into the grate, touched a match, and they burned into a bright little flame, then quivered into white ashes. He went to his desk and wrote a cheque.

"Here is your money, Jim. I have written it carefully, so you cannot add a cipher. I never trust a blackguard. My house is no longer a home to you, the sooner you go the better it will be for both of us."

"That will suit me," said Jim, pocketing his cheque; "but I tell you this, you don't know her. They all say any woman can fool you."

"Don't give me your brother Dean's sentiments second-hand," said Scott coldly. He flung open the door and Jim departed, with a malignant look at me.

"Now, Letty," said John, coming back, "you see when you face a danger it often disappears. Honesty is a very good weapon. I only ask of you one promise, that if you are ever tempted to write to a man again, one that you love and think worthy, you will tell me and let me judge. I don't want to pry into your affairs, but after this I think I deserve your confidence."

"I hate all men," I cried angrily, "and with what I have cost you, and all the trouble and the quarrel I have made in your family, I seem to be a blot on everyone's happiness."

"Because you do not try to add to it. Turn over a new leaf and find sunshine in your home and duties. Try to be loving and kind to Margaret and your grandfather. It will cost you very little, Letty, only patience and gentle, kindly ways, to make people love you. Then (with the half-pathetic smile) leave us our mysteries, us old folks, and live in your own present. Now, will you try to do these things for me?"

"I will, with all my heart," I sobbed. What a swollen face and red eyes I had! Such a fright as I looked in the glass! I drew my hat over my face. I knew he was laughing at my vanity, too, for his voice had a merry ring in it when he told me to wait a moment and he would go home with me. He came back with his mother after a few moments, and she gave me her hand with a polite little speech, that I knew John had made her say.

"Letty is to go to church with us on Sundays, and to dine here after this," he said firmly; "you will make arrangements for that, mother."

A big rebellious sob choked itself up, and I could not control it.

"Repentance is so hard," I said, "and that very same minister too."

I hated myself then. Did I not know he meant to show the world it had no right to slander? Would not all those venomous tongues be silenced when they saw me with his mother in the family pew? Even then a wicked thought came into my mind, of how every one would stare as they saw me between the crêpe draped ladies.

"My mother always liked you, Letty. She has the kindest heart in the world," John went on, his arm about that tiny, dainty figure.

"But she is so naughty," said Mrs. Scott helplessly. "I thought the convent would have changed her; perhaps they were stricter in my time. And then you know about that skeleton. Suppose the Bishop had seen it first. But, John, I do think James was to blame; but you must not say so for the world."

"I intend to win over Aunt Ann," laughed John. "What fortresses I have stormed for you, Letty!"

Mrs. Scott put out her little wrinkled hand again, and I, with a sob, bent and kissed it.

"My lips, dear," she said. "I know you will be a very good girl now."

Blinded by my tears, I went out with John. I had been rude to that dear lady, and even that powder speech came back to haunt me. In silence we walked along the beach. At last I said, clumsily:

"I used to write in my copy-book, 'Honesty is the best policy,'" then I relapsed into shamed silence.

"And 'A friend in need is a friend indeed,' was that not one of the copies too? Am I to be the friend, Letty? Don't fret your little heart about Jim. I meant to send him away. If there is a cub on earth it is my nephew."

"But I have said such nasty things about you," I cried. "I called you a 'Mexican,' and 'Old John Scott,' and all such hideous and ungrateful things."

"What a very deluge of tears and repentance, Letty. Only keep half those good resolutions, especially about the 'Old John Scott,' and we can be very good friends. Good-night."

He pressed my hand and left me. I watched him with wistful eyes. I would have given half my years if there had been no memory in my heart of that awful night at the Hotel Gilbert to stand between him and me, to darken the gratitude and affection for him that had come into my life.

(To be continued next week.)

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THE END OF THE FAMILY FEUD.

"WHAT in thunder——" began Colonel Starrett.

"Confound them! Why haven't they straightened things? Where's my breakfast?" He rang the bell savagely. "Here! Jane—Kitty—where are you?"

A minute later the door was timidly opened.

"Please, zur," said a very small voice.

A girl of ten, her dark, pert face peering out from a dark blue hood, stood on the threshold.

"Well?" questioned the Colonel sharply.

"Kitty told me to wait in the hall till I heard the bell, zur, an' then to come in an' tell you as how Jane got took bad last night with the influenza an' went home."

"Why couldn't Kitty tell me that herself? Where is she?"

The diminutive envoy shook in her well-ventilated shoes.

"My—my sister Kitty, zur—she's gone to get married."

"Married!" roared the Colonel.

"Yes, zur. To the butcher's young man."

Colonel Starrett's indignation had been appallingly fierce, but now he broke down laughingly. He tossed the child a coin.

"She was right. Now, then, off you go—and save me a bit of the wedding cake."

She ran off grinning, and he set himself to light a fire in the kitchen grate, and make a cup of coffee. Half an hour later he gulped down a drink of the bitter, blackish mixture he had evolved from the best Mocha; then, saddling his horse, he rode toward the neighbouring town.

Less than a mile down the road he passed a long, low hedge, now leafless, a skeleton orchard, and, set back from the road, a comfortable gabled house. The sight of it brought up an annoying recollection, and he actually groaned.

"That idiotic lad!" he muttered, referring to his only son. "The idea of his writing me to say he had met a daughter of George Stine's, and that she was so pretty he had forgotten all about the feud, and fallen in love with her. I think," grimly, "that my letter brought him to his senses."

It would have puzzled Colonel Starrett to explain lucidly the original cause of the feud. It was something about a disputed strip of meadowland. His grandfather had begun the quarrel, his father had reverently perpetuated it, and he would have considered himself a traitor if he had failed to harbour resentment against every member of the Stine family.

Not that there were many left. There was George Stine's plump, brisk, bustling widow; the girl, of whom Harry wrote, who had been away at school almost all the time of late years; and a wild young slip of a lad, just entering his teens.

In the small town, Colonel Starrett found it impossible to replace his vanished domestics. That is, to replace them to his satisfaction; for the Colonel was inclined to be a trifle exacting. However, a few hours later, he wished he had not been so hard to please, for after supper he went into the cellar to get some firewood, stepped on a potato lying on the stairs, lost his balance, and fell headlong down the vegetable-scented darkness.

He lay there half stunned. After a while, with a painful effort, he managed to drag himself upstairs, and into his cheerless sitting room.

He lay on the sofa, wondering how long it would be before any one happened to come in. His nearest neighbours were the Stines, and he reflected, with a sarcastic snort, that there was no danger of any of them dropping in.

"Thank goodness, Robin will be home to-morrow," he murmured, as he fell into an uncomfortable sleep.

And, sure enough, about eleven o'clock the following day, Robin Starrett, a tall, good looking, well-dressed young fellow, strode up the avenue to the paternal mansion, and discovered his helpless father railing against things in general and servants in particular.

"Desolation, indeed!" assented Robin. "No fires—no promise of dinner—no comfort at all. What luck!"

He put down his bag and grabbed up his hat.

"Where are you going?" demanded Colonel Starrett.

"To hunt up a girl who got out of the same train as I did at the station. Good cook and first-class housekeeper generally. A treasure for us, if I can induce her to come."

His arguments, whatever they were, proved successful. In three-quarters of an hour he triumphantly presented his prize to the Colonel. The old man regarded her searchingly. She was a slender, pretty girl of nineteen, with a soft little fringe of dark hair across her white brow; large, grey, appealing eyes, and "a mouth like a baby's, dewy red." Even his masculine eye perceived that she was not only well, but fashionably dressed.

"Humph!" he muttered to Robin. "Too stylish to be worth her salt. But let her try."

And, six hours later, he was willing to admit his mistake, for the cool bandages the doctor had ordered to be frequently renewed, were reducing the swelling of his injured ankle; his favourite room was neatly swept and dusted; a bright fire burned in the grate; and on the small table set for two, that was drawn up beside his lounge, a tempting little dinner steamed savourily.

"I'll give her half as much again as I gave Kitty," the Colonel declared, as he drank his coffee. "I haven't eaten such an apple turnover since I ate those my mother used to make." And he beamed approvingly upon her while she removed the dishes.

Robin lounged about the house reading, smoking, talking prospects and politics with his father, apparently well satisfied with his dull holiday.

One dreary, dismal February evening, when the rain was coming down in noisy sheets, and the trees were waving their black arms in contortions of unrest, the old man, who had been hobbling about the corridors with the aid of his stick, called to the girl, when he saw her lighting the hall lamp.

"Run upstairs, Dolly, like a good child, and bring me down the book you'll find on the window-sill of my room."

"Yes, sir," she answered, and ran up the stairs to fetch the book he required.

The Colonel heard a knock at the back door. He made his way to the kitchen. The large room was clean and well-lighted. There was an appetising smell of muffins and devilled ham in the air.

Rap-tap-tap! The Colonel opened the door.

A dripping boy sidled in, and stood looking up at the Colonel in a stupor of affright.

The Colonel, who always looked over the heads of his small neighbours, did not recognise the lad.

"Well?" he demanded. "What do you want?"

The little chap grew bold with the importance of his errand.

"Mother's had a spill," he said, "and want's Dorothy as soon as she can come."

"Dorothy? There's no Dorothy here."

"Oh, yes, there is—my sister, Dorothy Stine. There she is now. Mother's ill, Dorothy."

The girl in the doorway stood dazed a moment, her colour coming and going. Then a firm arm was clasped round her waist, and she was drawn gently forward

"What—what's this?" stammered the Colonel, staring hard at the girl and his son.

"This is my wife, father," said Robin. "We were married three weeks ago. I left her in the town the day I came from the city, until I learned how you would receive her. But, after I saw the real state of affairs, I persuaded her to give you a chance to learn to love her for her own sake."

"But," spluttered the Colonel, "the feud?"

"Let it die a natural death," advised Robin. "Get your hat, dear, and a coat, I'll take you over to your mother's."

When they returned the master of the house, sitting by the fire, looked up and said, "I—I hope your mother is better."

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